

A

S E R M O N

Preached before The Right Honourable

693. f.
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The LORD-MAYOR,

THE

ALDERMEN and CITIZENS,

AT THE

CATHEDRAL-CHURCH of *St. Paul*, on *Friday*,
February 6, 1756.

BEING

The Day appointed by His MAJESTY's Proclamation
for a GENERAL FAST.

By *PHILIP BEARCROFT*, A. M.
Chaplain to the Right Honourable the LORD-MAYOR.

L O N D O N :

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MDCC LVI.

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BETHELL, Mayor.

Tuesday the 17th Day of *February* 1756, and in the 29th Year of the Reign of King *GEORGE* the SECOND, of *Great-Britain*, &c.

IT is ordered, That the Thanks of this Court be given to the Reverend Mr. *Bearcroft*, Chaplain to the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor, for his Sermon, preached before the Lord-Mayor, Aldermen, and several of the Livery Companies of this City, at the Cathedral-Church of *St. Paul*, on *Friday* the 6th Instant, being the Day appointed by His MAJESTY for a General Fast, and that he be desired to print the same.



M A N.

LUKE xii. 4th and 5th Verses.

And I say unto you, my Friends, be not afraid of them who kill the Body, and after that have no more that they can do: But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, hath Power to cast into Hell; Yea, I say unto you, fear him.

OUR blessed Lord had been most boldly rebuking Vice, and reprovng the Hypocrisy of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* to their Faces, and that before the Multitude, whose Admiration and Respect by their pretended Sanctity they sought. Enraged at this they began vehemently to urge him, and to provoke him to speak of many Things, laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his Mouth, whereby they might accuse him: But he, who spoke as never Man before him spoke, was not to be entangled in his Talk. In the mean Time, (says the first Verse in the Chapter) when there was gathered together an innumerable Multitude of People, insomuch that they trod one upon another, he began to say unto his Disciples first of

all; Beware of the Leaven of the *Pharisees*, which is Hypocrisy; *i. e.* take heed of Hypocrisy, which spoils all their Actions, their weekly Fasts, their long Prayers, their critical Nicety in paying of Tithes, these, by their perverse Use of them, were become abominable in the Sight of God, because they were practiced only to deceive, to gain Honour and a great Reputation for Holiness, that they might the more easily impose on, and plunder the deluded Croud. Our Saviour then proceeds to tell his Disciples, that they should not be afraid of their Malice, but openly reprove their flagrant Enormities, for the very worst which they could do to them was only to kill the Body, *i. e.* separate it from the Soul, while the Almighty God, if they basely imitated, or servilely feared to reprimand these detestable Hypocrites, had it in his Power to cast both Body and Soul into Hell.

Christ introduceth this Piece of Advice with his usual Preface to all Matters of the highest Importance: I say unto you, my Friends, be not afraid of them which kill the Body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you, whom you shall fear, fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath Power to cast into Hell; Yea, I say unto you, fear him. Since nothing else would do, but all the Arguments drawn from the other Divine Attributes were perverted and misapplied, Christ cometh at last to God's infinite Power, and to make the deeper Impression

pression on us, brings it Home to ourselves, and, in the Language of the Prophet, sets the Terrors of the Lord in Array against us, to try, if even these could force us to our Duty, and make us learn this the first Lesson of all true Religion, to fear God, *i. e.* to entertain such a reverential Awe of him in our Minds, as to value and esteem his Favour, more than that of the whole World; for as *Christ* reasoneth upon this Subject, *What shall a Man profit, if he gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul; or what shall a Man give in Exchange for his Soul?* If that is once lost and cast into Hell, there to dwell with everlasting Burnings, what will *all* the Things of this World avail him? Can they procure his Liberty, or so much as one Moments Respite ^{from} his Pains? Those racking Pains, whose Worm dieth not, and whose Fire will never be quenched? This surely is a Consideration, which (if any thing can) must startle the most determined Sinner, and even in Spite of himself, make him tremble at the fatal Issue of a wicked Life. It is a fearful Thing to fall into the Hands of the Living God; for who can stand in his Sight when he is angry; if his Wrath be kindled, yea, but a little, happy are all they, (and they alone) who put their Trust in him.

But if this will not prevail with us, let us consider that God's Justice is as infinite as his Mercy, let us for a while attend seriously to those horrible and affrighting Questions of the Prophet: Who among us
shall

shall dwell with the devouring Fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting Burnings? And we shall all answer and say, let us amend ourselves at once, and shew our Conviction of the Necessity of Repentance, by beginning to repent; otherwise (he that is faithful hath promised) we have God's Veracity and Justice engaged to us, we shall have our Portion with those everlasting Burnings, which I tremble with Horror but to name. Who among us can dwell with everlasting Burnings? Whose Blood doth not curdle at the Thought of Hell-Fire? Turn ye, turn ye then from your evil Ways, for they lead to these Chambers of Destruction. God, it is true, is very merciful and long-suffering, and rich in Goodness and Forbearance to the Wicked, to try if it be possible by these gentler Methods to reclaim them; God never willetth the Death of a Sinner, but he had rather, much rather, that he would turn from his Wickedness and live; but if he will be obstinate and run headlong on, God's last Method is to set his Terrors in Array against him, to fright him into Repentance before that dreadful Day of the Lord shall come, when he shall arise to shake terribly the Earth, and to take Vengeance on all those obdurate Sinners who will not repent, and obey the Gospel of Christ his Son; when God shall give up his Omnipotence to Wrath, and make his whole Displeasure to arise: Then, though the Wicked dig into Hell (God tells them by the Prophet *Amos*) thence shall his Hand take them; though they climb
up

up into Heaven, thence will he bring them down; though they hide themselves in the Top of *Carmel*, thence will he search them out; and though they be hid in the Bottom of the Sea, thence will he command the Serpent, and he shall Bite them. Say not thou therefore, I will hide myself from the Lord; shall any remember me from above? I shall not be remembered among so many People; for what is my Soul among such an infinite Number of Creatures? Say not thou thus; for behold the Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens, the Deep, and the Earth, and all that therein is shall be moved, when God shall visit; the Mountains also, and Foundations of the Earth shall be shaken with Trembling, when the Lord looketh upon them.

What Heart can meditate on these Things worthily, and not make it the governing Principle of all its Actions, to serve God with reverence and godly Fear.

Necessity is laid upon us, yea, woe be unto us as Ministers of Christ, if we preach not sometimes this Part of his Gospel, wherein the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men, who hold the Truth in Unrighteousness; for otherwise we shall one Day be reproached, as the Priests of *Israel* were by the Prophet *Isaiab*, we shall be called blind Watchmen, all ignorant, and dumb Dogs that
cannot

cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, and loving to Slumber; and what is worse we shall be condemned of Hypocrisy by our Lord; because, in direct Contradiction to the Precept in the Text, wherein we are forbid to fear Man, we flatter and deceive to please him, and cry Peace, Peace, where there is no Peace; there is no Peace saith my God to the Wicked. This therefore I am obliged to tell you, and that the bitter Consequence of Sin is Misery, eternal Misery both of Body and Soul. Knowing these Terrors of the Lord, it is our indispensable Duty to lay them before you sometimes, and by these Arguments to endeavour to persuade you to forsake your vicious Courses; and when more properly can these Terrors be enforced, than on this solemn Day of Humiliation; when the King, the Princes, the Counsellors, the Magistrates, the Governors, the Captains, and the Judges, and all the People of the Land are met together, with a most awful Sense of God's Almighty Power (at whose Rebuke the Earth trembleth, and the very Foundations of the Hills shake, and the Sea is removed from his Place) to throw themselves down before his Footstool, and to bewail their Iniquities, their great and manifold Iniquities, which have most justly provoked his Wrath and Indignation against this Land. For, ~~is it~~ not to be feared, that the Lord may have a Controversy with us as with the *Israelites* of Old, because there is no Truth or Knowledge of God in the Land; by swearing and lying, and killing, and committing Adultery,

Adultery they break out, and Blood toucheth Blood? And if we say, surely these are the Poor, they are foolish, they know not the Way of the Lord and the Judgment of their God; but we will get us to the Great Men, and will speak to them, surely they have known the Way of the Lord, and the Judgment of their God; but alas! These have altogether broken the Yoke, and burst the Bonds, they have waxen fat, they shine, yea, they overdo the Deeds of the poor Wicked; and yet they prosper: And shall I not visit for these Things, saith the Lord; shall not my Soul be avenged of such a Nation as this. God's Judgments are abroad, his Awakening Hand hath been lifted up very near us, and we have but too much Reason to fear, it will fall most heavily on us, unless we turn to him in Weeping, Fasting, and Praying; lest we also be consumed. For otherwise, God's Justice and Honour stand engaged to us for his doing it, and that, as we are a very sinful People, in this present World. It is not with Nations, as with particular Persons; there is a Time appointed for God to Judge us in a Future State as Individuals; but as we are combined into the Body Politick *in this World only*, God will reward and punish us, as to our Behaviour as a Nation, *here, and shew Mercy unto Thousands of them that love him and keep his Commandments*, while he visiteth the Iniquities of the Fathers, upon the iniquitous Children, *to the third and fourth Generation of them that hate him*; because they continue the same

permanent Body as a Nation, and therefore continue the same proper Objects of God's vindictive Justice, if for any very heinous Crimes he shall think fit to punish them through successive Generations. And should our Sons of *Belial*, say upon this Occasion, with those of old Times, *the Fathers have eaten sour Grapes, and the Childrens Teeth are set on Edge*, (for it is such old Arguments as these modernized, that these Wretches, who are wiser in their own Conceit than seven Men that can render a Reason, generally make Use of,) if they will Reason with God, he will advise them not to use that Proverb any more, for *his Ways are equal*, and the Soul that sinneth, it shall surely die; and therefore they are only the wicked Children of wicked Parents, who are punished for the complicated Sins of their Fathers and themselves. And as to those few Righteous, who may be involved among the Wicked, in any National Calamities, though in the Sight of the Unwise, they seem to die, and their Departure is taken for Misery, yet they are in Peace; they are in Truth, like good King *Josiah*, only taken away from the Evil to come, or, having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded, God having proved them and found them worthy for himself.

The Wise Man, in *Ecclesiasticus*, observes of these National Humiliations, that they, who fear the Lord, will humble themselves in his Sight, saying, we will fall into the Hands of the Lord, and not into the
Hands

Hands of Men ; for as his Majesty is, so is his Mercy. The Majesty and Mercy of God are both transcendently great.

The *Affyrian* Courtiers Salutation of their Monarchs (O King live for ever.) is strictly applicable only to the great King of Kings, God over all, blessed for ever ; who, when condescending to shadow out his Excellency to his beloved *Daniel*, appeared under the Figure of the Ancient of Days, *whose Garment was white as Snow, and the Hair of his Head like pure Wool, his Throne was like the fiery Flame, and his Wheels as burning Fire, and a fiery Stream issued out before him : Thousand Thousands ministred unto him, and ten Thousand Times ten Thousand stood before this great and only Potentate, who is wonderful among the Princes of the Earth ; who giveth Grace to the Humble, but scattereth the Proud in the Imagination of their Hearts ; to teach us not to be afraid of Man that shall die, and of the Son of Man that shall be made as Grass, but to rely on the Lord our Maker, who hath stretched forth the Heavens and laid the Foundations of the Earth.*

And when God was pleased to reveal himself to his Servant *Moses*, a Voice from Heaven proclaimed him, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in Goodness and Truth ; as

choosing rather to be honoured for his Mercy and Goodness, than for his Majesty and Power.

It was the affectionate Caution of *Moses* to his beloved *Israelites*, to beware, lest, when they had eaten and were full, and had builded them goodly Houses, and dwelled therein, and their Flocks and their Herds were multiplied, their Silver and Gold were multiplied, and all that they had was multiplied, their Hearts should be lifted up, and they should say, my Power and the Might of my Hand hath gotten me this Wealth. Plenty is too apt to fill the Mind with Wantonness and Pride, while it *should* work on truly noble Ones the contrary Effect; because this Goodness of God yet endureth to us, it ought to lead us all, from the Highest to the Lowest, to Repentance and Amendment of Life.—The Sword, the first of God's sore Judgments, is drawn in our Colonies, and it is threatened to be levelled at our Throats. For the Prevention of this, we have this Day most earnestly besought God, that he would vouchsafe to go forth with our Fleets and Armies; that he would continue to be gracious, and make fast the Bars of our Gates within us, that no presumptuous Foe, notwithstanding all his mighty Boastings, may be able to hurt us. The Events and Issues of War are without our Reach; they depend on the good Pleasure of him who doth whatsoever he pleaseth in Heaven and in Earth, in the Sea

Sea, and in all deep Places. It is God, who giveth the Victory; and, to obtain this great Blessing, when our Host goeth forth to War, we must be especially careful to put from us every wicked Thing, lest He, who is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity, should turn his Face from us and we should be troubled; now when great Vexations are on the Inhabitants of the Earth round about us, and great Cities are fallen and sunk under God's correcting Hand.

We are taught, by the Prophet *Jeremiah*, that at what Instant God shall speak concerning a Nation and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up or to pull down and to destroy it; if that Nation, against which he hath pronounced, turn from its Evil, he will repent of the Evil which he thought to do unto it. And at what Instant he shall speak concerning a Nation and concerning a Kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it do Evil in his Sight, that it obey not his Voice, then he will repent of the Good wherewith he said he would benefit it. *Nineveh*, that great City, (wherein were more than Sixscore Thousand Persons so young that they could not discern between their Right Hand and their Left,) is a pregnant Instance of this awful Truth: Upon God's forewarning *Nineveh* by his Prophet *Jonah*, (yet Forty Days and *Nineveh* shall be destroyed;) the People believed God and proclaimed a Fast, and put on Sackcloth and Ashes from the greatest to the least of them, and cried mightily unto the
Lord

Lord, and turned them from their evil Ways; and God repented of the Evil which he said he would do unto them, and he did it not.

We of this great City also have in Mercy been admonished, and not very long ago, by its Tremblings, received very awakening Strokes: But (blessed be God) the Sentence of Condemnation, the Hand-writing on the Wall, is not yet come out against us; And may God continue to spare us, tho' we deserve Punishment; or however, not correct us in Anger, but in the Midst of Judgment remember Mercy, and be favourable to us, who have humbled our Souls in his Sight and turned to him in Fasting and Prayer!

Repentance and Confession of Sins is alway, (but more especially in Times of Humiliation,) the most proper Introduction to the divine Majesty, wherefore our Church Liturgy brings us every Day before God, with the Acknowledgment, that we have erred and strayed from his Ways; but on this most Solemn Occasion, we confess with Sorrow and Confusion of Face, the crying Sins of this Nation, our long Unfruitfulness under the Means of Grace and the Light of the Gospel, and the many wonderful Deliverances of this Church and State, which God of his infinite Goodness hath vouchsafed unto us, and therefore it is only owing to the Bowels of his Mercy that we are not consumed.

Our

Our Blessed Lord hath kindly cautioned us against Presumption in his Answer to those *Jews*, who told him of those *Galileans*, whose blood *Pilate* had mingled with their Sacrifices—*except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish*. We ought to pity and compassionate those unhappy Persons, who are involved in any great and common Calamity, and not arrogantly to conclude that they were greater Sinners than ourselves; we ought to take Warning from their Misfortunes, and to endeavour, by a timely Repentance, to make our Peace with our offended Creator, lest the same, or even a worse Punishment, overtake us for our manifold Transgressions.

God's Judgments are a great Deep, much too deep to be fathomed by the short Line of Human Understanding; and therefore, instead of thinking uncharitably of the unhappy Objects suffering under them; it is our proper Duty to forsake Wickedness, and to learn Righteousness, and to serve God with Reverence and *Godly Fear*. Fear is the most watchful Passion of the Soul, implanted in it by our allgracious Creator to forewarn and forearm us against all impending Dangers; and it is by some Men objected to as a perpetual Disquietude to our Minds, but in *Godly Fear*, this is the very reverse of Truth; there is this especial and most inestimable Property in the Fear of God, that it freeth us from all other Fear.

He

He that (according to the bold Expression of Scripture) walketh with God, and has made him his Friend, will joyfully exclaim, *the Lord is on my Side, I will not fear what Man can do unto me.* He will fear neither Man, nor all the Powers of Hell, he will dwell in Safety, and rest in Peace, guarded by that Omnipotence, of which the Wicked have felt the Arm, and dread the very Thought.

On the contrary, if we consult Experience, we shall find none so fearful as those who pretend to cast behind them all Fear, I mean the Modern Free-thinker and Debauchee; of these Men that of the *Roman* Satyrift is still literally true; these Bravoes are the most errant Cowards and turn pale at the Thunder of that Power, which they pretend to despise. For a Punishment of their Arrogance, God giveth them a trembling Heart; and it is but Just, that since they will not reverence God as Sons, they should be overwhelmed with Astonishment as Slaves. It is therefore true, most strictly true, that the Fear of God, or a due Regard to his Almighty Power and perpetual Presence with us, will deliver us from all other Fear; and tho' the Sea should be troubled, and the Waves thereof should be mighty and rage horribly, tho' the Foundations of the Earth should be shaken, and the Hills be removed and carried into the Midst of the Sea, at God's chiding, at the blasting
of

of the Breath of his Displeasure ; secure of his Almighty Protection, who careth for his Servants, God bids every one of them not to fear, for he is with him; not to be dismayed, for he will strengthen him and help him with his Hand; when he passeth thro' the Waters he will be with him, and when he walketh thro' the Fire he shall not be burned.

It is not for us to know the Methods and Seasons of God's Visitations, he hath reserved them to himself to awe a wicked and presumptuous World with their Dread. But he most kindly hath forewarned us by Christ, (that when there shall be Signs in the Sun, and in the Moon, and in the Stars ; and on the Earth Distress of Nations with Perplexity ; the Sea and the Waves roaring ; Mens Hearts failing them with Fear, and looking after those Things which are coming upon the Earth,) to take Heed to ourselves, lest at any Time our Hearts be overcharged with Surfeiting and Drunkenness, and Cares of this life ; and to watch and pray, that we may be accounted worthy to escape all these Things that shall come upon the Earth, and to Stand before the Son of Man, Christ himself, when he shall come to judge us. Therefore let every one of us firmly resolve, to begin this very Day (with the Assistance of God's Grace) to cleanse ourselves from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, till we become perfect in Holiness through the Fear of God.

This is the true and only Way to save ourselves, and at the same Time to do Honour to God, and to our Holy Religion, and to preserve this great City, by adding to the Number of those few righteous Men, for whose Sake, (and its noble Charities greatly contributing to cover the Multitude of its Sins) we hope God will continue to be Gracious, and to repeat his Loving-kindnesses, which have been ever of Old.

FINIS.

